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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority theme: initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit

Further initiatives for the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the context of its review of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and in accordance with its multi-year programme of work and the agenda for its thirty-seventh session, as approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1998/226 of 28 July 1998, the Commission for Social Development will consider in 1999 two priority themes, namely, "Social services for all", and "Initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit". The present report, to be considered by the Commission under the second priority theme, contains proposals on further initiatives to be addressed by the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and further initiatives. A separate report, on preliminary assessment of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit (E/CN.5/1999/4), is also submitted to the Commission under this item.

The report consists of three main sections. The introduction describes the criteria for selection of issues. Sections I — X describe possible issues under each of the 10 commitments adopted at Copenhagen. The report's conclusion emphasizes that these proposals are preliminary in nature and that, at the present stage, there is a crucial need to identify priorities and to mandate the elaboration of a few specific initiatives.

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Introduction

1. The holding of the World Summit for Social Development, and the attendance of 117 heads of State or Government and the representation of 69 other States, were a powerful global expression of commitment to social goals. These were stated in terms of the three central goals of poverty eradication, full employment and social integration and developed in the preparatory process into the 10 commitments agreed at the Summit.[1]

2. Since the Summit, Governments and international organizations have responded to the 10 commitments and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development[2] agreed at Copenhagen in many strategic and concrete ways. There has been marked improvement in the attention being given to social issues by many countries and in most international organizations, initiatives have been taken, and policies have evolved in ways that are contributing to movement towards the Summit goals.

3. There are wide national differences in the extent of, and capacity for, implementation. The period since the Summit has been relatively brief and, recently, external circumstances for many countries have deteriorated. Therefore, the process of moving towards achievement of the Summit goals can, in the best of circumstances, have only begun. Where strategies and policies have been changed, it is too early for substantial, measurable results to have been achieved. A survey of available evidence is summarized in the report of the Secretary-General on preliminary assessment of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (E/CN.5/1999/4). It suggests that, globally, the absolute number of people living in poverty is still increasing; that the number of people officially recorded as unemployed remains high; that the number of underemployed people is enormous and growing; and that social disintegration is intensifying in some countries.

4. Therefore, the imperatives for focusing attention on these issues remain at least as strong as, if not stronger than, at the time of the Summit. To seriously attempt this requires renewed commitment not only to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development[3] and Programme of Action but also to searching for additional and more effective ways of implementing them.

5. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in Geneva from 26 to 30 June 2000 and its preparatory process offer a welcome opportunity for sharing and comparing experiences, learning from the policies and programmes of other countries, strengthening commitment, encouraging more effective action and identifying further concrete means of addressing the 10 commitments. The fact that the special session is being held in the millennial year will give an additional incentive to treating these central social issues with a long-term perspective, and to the preparation of strategies that are appropriate for the early part of the next century.

6. The objectives of the special session identified by the General Assembly include both evaluating the effectiveness of implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the Summit and deciding on further initiatives for achieving these commitments. At its organizational session in May 1998, the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the United Nations World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives agreed that the framework for discussion at the special session would be the 10 commitments made at Copenhagen. Initiatives are to be sought in relation to each of them. The thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development offers the first formal opportunity for discussion of the issues that should be addressed by the special session; and the present report is the first review of issues that could be addressed at the special session.

7. The generation of additional concrete and innovative means of strengthening and extending the implementation of the Summit commitments and plans is a demanding task. The first step is to decide on the issues that need the most urgent attention. Accordingly, this report concentrates on identification of suitable issues for inclusion in the agenda of the special session. A few comments are also made about possible initiatives relating to them.

8. The criteria for selection of issues to be included in the agenda for the special session include:

- The importance of the issue in respect of addressing one or more of the commitments;
- Whether the issue was included in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development or the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development;
- Whether possible means for addressing the issue are available;
- The importance of a proposal related to an issue as a contribution to, or a means of coping with a constraint on achieving one of the commitments;
- The concreteness of such a proposal. At its organizational session, the Preparatory Committee agreed that the special session would simply reaffirm

the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and so would avoid renegotiating the text. The special session will therefore have the opportunity to concentrate entirely on new initiatives for implementation;

- The relevance of a proposal to the commitments. This is a broad limitation, however, because the commitments include creating an enabling environment for social development, and this covers many economic, political and institutional issues as well as the directly social, which is in any case a broad category itself;
- The feasibility of a proposal. Feasibility is a complex issue to assess, because it has several dimensions including the political, institutional, administrative and financial, and these qualities vary enormously between countries. It would therefore be unwise to exclude interesting ideas at an early stage just because they look complex. There will be scope for assessing feasibility as the process of preparation proceeds.

9. The following possibilities have been identified for consideration from such sources as the statements made by delegations at the organizational session, at the Commission for Social Development, at the Economic and Social Council and at the General Assembly, particularly during the debate on follow-up to the Summit; material published by non-governmental organizations; and recent published literature. The issues are described under the most relevant commitment.

I. An enabling environment for social development

10. Harmonious and equitable social and economic development requires both formal democratic systems and participatory institutions and mechanisms. Necessary conditions include both free and fair elections and opportunities for the various groups to express their opinions, and to be heard and for equitable compromises to be reached. Free and fair elections — as the experience of many new democracies has shown — are only one element of a democratic society, albeit a crucial one. Some other critical elements include well-functioning legislative and judicial systems, respect for political, economic and social rights, an independent media, use of legal norms, and predictable rules for decision-making and conflict resolution. These elements are prerequisites of sustaining an open society and interrelated participatory democracy.

11. Experience with various participatory mechanisms could well be discussed during the preparatory process, with a view to recommending additional possibilities. Subsidiarity is a widely accepted principle involving dealing with issues at the most appropriate level, so it is required that attention be directed not only to national government but also to local government and to international governance.

12. Since the Summit, economic and social interdependence has continued to increase; thus one issue that would naturally be in the agenda for the special session is the implications of globalization for social policy. The issue has both analytical and prescriptive dimensions, and since there has been much discussion of the former, at the special session the concentration should naturally be on national and international policy responses.

13. Awareness, concern and even preoccupation with globalization have intensified considerably since the Summit was held. One of the important achievements of the Summit was the recognition that countries could not achieve social goals alone let alone, cope with the consequences of growing international integration by themselves. With growing global integration, increasing international cooperation has become an imperative for social and economic development. Several responses are required.

14. First and most important is the recognition that, despite globalization, every Government still has considerable power. The discussion of national policy at the Summit was, and such discussion at the special session has to be, premised on this fact.

15. Second, countries can act together to more effectively reduce threats of international volatility, instability, inefficiency and inequity. More of the standards and infrastructure of international exchange have to be established or provided by countries acting together. The norms and structures of such areas as trade and finance, communication and travel and some aspects of health services, social policy and crime prevention must be universal if they are to be effective. Global norms and standards have to be extended and strengthened and the range of global public goods increased. The commitments and parts of the Programme of Action of the Summit are examples of international standard setting. Such cooperative international activity must be a major focus of the special session.

16. Third, care about the preparation, sequencing, speed and extent of liberalization is required. Following the Asian financial crisis, it is now clearer than ever that there have been high costs for some countries from weaknesses in both domestic policy and the international institutional and policy

structure. For while major elements in the crisis have had to do with domestic structures, institutions and policies, a major impediment to social development is international financial market volatility and disorder. The special session may wish to discuss this issue and to make recommendations, perhaps including objectives, guidelines and principles that could be of fundamental importance as inputs into the General Assembly processes on finance for development.

17. Since the Summit, much more attention has been given by corporations and by Governments to the social responsibilities of business. There has been considerable activity in terms of extending the articulation of goals, principles and policies. The special session might like to systematically review this and to attempt some basic, globally applicable guidelines.

18. Concern about the inequities and inefficiencies caused by corruption has increased since the Summit. There is growing recognition of the injustices and distortions caused by corruption. There is recognition, too, of the complexity of corruption and the variety of the forms that it can take, at both national and international levels. Progress has been made in several intergovernmental contexts in establishing a framework to discourage corruption and in setting up disincentives. Several delegations have mentioned the possibility of addressing this issue during the process of preparing for the special session.

19. One of the issues most frequently mentioned by delegates at the organizational session for consideration by the special session was standardizing development indicators. Preparatory work on that subject is under way and the results will be included in one of the background papers to be circulated before the first session of the Preparatory Committee in May 1999.

20. The issue of minimum standards for social policy could well be considered, perhaps in the form of a code of best practice of social policy. This suggestion is likely to be raised for discussion at the session of the Commission.

21. This list does not include many crucial elements of the international system such as trade or investment. Nor does it include crime and drugs, which were discussed at a special session of the General Assembly devoted to countering the world drug problem together during 1998. The reason is that the effectiveness of the special session may well depend in part on focusing on a limited number of subjects. It is obviously appropriate to make the selection partly in terms of whether there have been recent opportunities to discuss them and also based on whether innovative progress is possible. Trade and investment and crime and drugs are huge subjects that have been extensively discussed in other forums and have therefore been excluded from these proposals.

II. Poverty eradication

22. The report of the Secretary-General on the preliminary assessment of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit indicates the global extent and depth of poverty. The enormity of the number of people in poverty is clear: about a quarter of humankind are severely deprived and more than another quarter are at the borderline. Poverty is the most important moral question facing this age.

23. International commitment to poverty eradication is expressed not only in the Copenhagen Declaration but also in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[4] and the Declaration on the Right to Development.[5] There is still no universal adoption of the Convention, and that is an important goal.

24. Much work has already been undertaken throughout the United Nations system on the subject of poverty eradication. This was briefly summarized in two of the reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on poverty eradication (A/52/573 and A/53/329). Shortly after the Summit, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) set up four task forces to prepare coordinated action on major commitments of all the global conferences. The organizational conclusion of this process within the United Nations system was a statement of commitment for action to eradicate poverty issued in June 1998 by the executive heads of all United Nations agencies. The statement reaffirmed "that poverty eradication ... is a key international commitment and a central objective of the United Nations system".

25. The executive heads of organizations in the United Nations system outlined the elements of a shared strategy and committed themselves to the concerted effort by all agencies towards poverty eradication and also to playing "a supportive and catalytic role in mobilizing the energies and resources of all development actors — Governments, the private sector, civil society, donors and above all the poor themselves — in the campaign against poverty".

26. The new United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, entitled *Overcoming Human Poverty*, published in October 1998, provides newly collected and collated information on national policies for poverty reduction in developing and transitional countries. Of the 130 countries for which data were obtained, 43 countries had

national poverty reduction plans and another 35 had a clear component in national economic and social strategies on poverty reduction. A further 40 are in the process of preparing plans. The authors say that "The most common components of these plans ... are improving access to basic social services, and creating opportunities for income and employment, but other items such as promoting community participation and conserving natural resources are also important ... Overall this survey does reveal a much stronger focus on planning for poverty reduction than in the past".

27. One issue that must be in the agenda of the special session is the national poverty reduction strategy, providing an opportunity for drawing on the experience of countries and international agencies since the Summit. A further recommendation about the value of the adoption of targets for poverty reduction and eradication supported by national strategies would be one obvious possible conclusion. Such an item would also provide a forum for discussion of obstacles to preparation or implementation of anti-poverty strategies, both national and international.

28. While there are many necessary conditions for rapid poverty reduction, many of which are discussed below, one that is readily amenable to influence and given too little attention is credit, both at the microlevel and for small business. One issue for discussion is additional means of encouraging microcredit schemes.

29. While the most effective approach to poverty reduction is commonly through attempting to enable the poor to help themselves, another necessary expression of commitment to poverty reduction strategy is redistribution. The extent of global poverty suggests that policies relating to redistribution have a place in the agenda of the special session.

30. The scope for introducing, expanding, and strengthening or reforming social protection systems is a major topic of debate in many countries at present, including those most severely affected by the financial crisis. Discussion of standards for social protection and of strategies for the introduction and management of social protection would be appropriate. A neglected subject that could well be addressed in this area is ways of improving the quality of management of national social protection systems.

31. For economies in transition, the process of movement towards a market structure has turned out to be much more difficult and painful than was originally anticipated. The patterns of transition vary substantially and some countries fared better than others in arresting the decline of output and in protecting the welfare of citizens. In most economies in transition, there has been a substantial rise in poverty, including child poverty. Also, the unemployed and the "working poor" are among those who are hit hardest. In many economies in transition, substantial groups of people affected by persistent poverty and multiple deprivations have emerged. The rise in poverty and inequality is undermining social development, particularly in many countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and threatening to reverse earlier social achievements and calling into question support of the population for the economic reforms. Taking into account the growing spread of poverty and its highly negative social and political dimensions, the special session may wish to consider what kind of national, regional and international measures can be recommended in order to reverse the negative trends.

III. Employment

32. Growth of employment has become the highest priority for national and international economic and social policy. It will contribute more than any other economic or social achievement to increasing personal and national economic security, to reducing waste, to increasing efficiency, to improving equity, to reducing poverty and to strengthening social integration. The Commission for Social Development, at its thirty-fifth session in February 1997 concluded that "... it is imperative for all countries and the international community to reinstate the attainment of full, productive, and appropriately and adequately remunerated and freely chosen employment as a central objective of economic and social policies."[6]

33. Yet, in most countries unemployment and underemployment are high. Growth of employment — of income-generating opportunities for work — could therefore well become the principal focus of the special session. Employment-centred economic and social policy not only increases opportunities for work but also encourages initiative, reduces poverty and can contribute to reducing welfare dependency. The agreed conclusions on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods, adopted by the Commission at its thirty-fifth session, in its resolution 35/2, suggest some ways forward.

34. The Commission recognized that setting time-bound goals and targets for expanding employment and reducing unemployment "would give a strong signal of the increased priority to be accorded to the objective of full employment."[7] In the past many countries set targets for the reduction of inflation or for economic growth but few set targets for the centrally important goal of employment growth and linked them with strategies for their achievement.

35. This involves refocusing and modifying macroeconomic policies. One of the issues that was central to the whole Summit was the importance of integrating economic and social policy more effectively. One of the principal areas where this is vital is in relation to macroeconomic policy. More contemporary international discussion of how to achieve a balanced approach to macroeconomic policy could be very valuable, focusing on how to simultaneously address economic and social goals, such as full employment and stable prices and development in the fullest sense, including both efficient economic growth and an effective strategy for increasing equity. The recent changes of emphasis by major industrialized countries and by the leaders of the European Union suggest the possibility of a new direction. Aspects of the issue relate to the scope for further international cooperation.

36. A more sophisticated balance of economic goals is possible, including aiming for simultaneous reduction of unemployment and low inflation. One of the benefits of globalization is that intensifying international competition removes or reduces the capacity of enterprises to administer prices and so reduces inflationary pressure. Reductions in union membership in some countries and low levels in others (which are regrettable to many people) are also reducing pressure for wage increases. In this situation, where national inflation rates are commonly lower than at any time since the beginning of the 1970s and in which inflationary pressure is much reduced, there is more scope for employment-enhancing macroeconomic policies.

37. A policy instrument that combines equity with economic responsibility but that is sometimes forgotten consists in promoting consensual, equitable approaches to income determination through tripartite negotiation of prices and incomes policies — sometimes called social pacts — by government, trade unions and business. These have been shown to make an important contribution to moderating wage growth and inflation, encouraging growth of employment and reducing industrial conflict in many countries, including Australia, Austria, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. An essential aspect of such policies is equitable income restraint: it is difficult to expect income restraint from wage earners if executives are receiving massive annual increases in their remuneration. The incentive structure of tax systems can be used to restrain excessive income inequities.

38. For many developing countries, the principal issue is development strategy: how to strengthen employment-generating, productivity-increasing human development. For most developing countries, rural development must be the main element in the national employment strategy. Crucial requirements are well known and include improving the access to and quality of primary, secondary, technical and vocational education; improving marketing arrangements for primary commodities; land reform; mobilization of domestic saving for infrastructure including small scale, local public works and for private investment; and attracting foreign direct investment under conditions that ensure benefits to the receiving countries.

39. The use of policies in all countries that simultaneously improve both efficiency and equity is quite feasible. Examples include maximizing opportunities for establishment and expansion of small business by increasing the availability of credit, including microcredit, minimizing interest rates, improving infrastructure and the equity of access to productive inputs such as land and sites for enterprise, and increasing the accessibility of information and advisory services. In many countries, both developing and developed, there are still unnecessary restrictions on informal sector and other small businesses.

40. Another important example of policy that improves both efficiency and equity is improvements in human services. In all countries, there is no satiation of the demand for services. Education, health, welfare and information services need to be extended or improved, pollution reduced, the environment better managed and the arts encouraged. As income rises, the proportion people want to spend on human services increases. Demand for education and training, for improvements in access to health services, and for care for the aged, the young and families in crisis rises, as does interest in travel and eating out, retailing and financial services, personal professional and technical services, and sports and culture.

41. The equitable availability of the first group of services can only be assured if they are principally supplied publicly. There are serious shortfalls in supplies of these public goods in all developing and transition countries and even in many developed countries. That countries might well want to aspire to international best practice in the provision of services for their own people, as well as in the production of goods and services for export, certainly requires increased outlays, not downsizing as a result of restructuring.

42. Increasing public support for the non-profit community sector is another cost-effective means of increasing both the availability of labour-intensive services and (thus) employment. Part-time and voluntary work can be particularly important in the provision of services to groups with special needs. The provision of core support by government can enable some community services to be

efficiently provided by combinations of part-time and volunteer workers.

43. Various types of employment experience and on-the-job training programmes have been found to be useful means of increasing the employability of the long-term unemployed in various countries. Among a great diversity of schemes are some that involve wage subsidies to employers; others that are short-term training programmes; and yet others that involve making small capital grants or loans to potential small entrepreneurs.

44. The weakness of labour-market institutions in developing countries has proved to be a severe handicap in dealing with the social consequences of economic crises and with the increased employment restructuring associated with greater integration into the global economy. It is therefore important to strengthen workers' and employers' organizations as well as institutions for collective bargaining and social dialogue. This will yield benefits in the form of greater social stability and the enhanced ability to mobilize broad-based cooperative effort in dealing with the problems of economic reform and the social consequences of economic crises. At the same time, it will also be important to strengthen the capacity of government agencies to design and implement active labour-market policies such as direct employment creation, retraining and redeployment assistance.

45. The Commission recognized that in most developing countries the informal (unregulated) sector is a major area of low productivity income-earning opportunity, that is to say, of sustainable livelihoods. Therefore, increasing productivity in rural and urban informal sectors — through improving the equity of access to credit, fertile land, infrastructure, basic social services such as education, training and health, and information and extension services — is vital.

46. One requirement for growth of both small business and the informal sector is an appropriate regulatory structure, which balances the interests of each sector of the community with those of innovative small entrepreneurs. Seeking that balance is an issue for each country, but sharing of experience could well contribute to more effective policies.

47. Innovative approaches to increasing employment were recommended at the International Expert Meeting on Innovative Employment Initiatives, hosted by the Austrian Government in February 1998 (see document A/53/350, annex). The report of the meeting contains a number of recommendations that the special session may wish to consider such as the reorganization of work, including reduction of working hours; the effectiveness of social pacts in some countries (discussed above); and employment subsidies to facilitate return to work for the long-term unemployed.

48. Flexible working time arrangements including part-time work, annualizing working time and changing patterns of daily and weekly working time can be organized in ways that suit both employees and employers if they are fairly negotiated. Changing structures for work organization, such as through the growth of contracting out and the growth in the range of services provided through the market, can increase employment opportunities, though they can also be misused for exploitation.

49. A particularly significant development was the adoption by the International Labour Conference at its eighty-sixth session on 18 June 1998 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up. This is a significant step towards fulfilling commitment 3 (i) adopted in Copenhagen on "ensuring quality jobs" and safeguarding "the basic rights and interests of workers".

50. A comprehensive national employment strategy must also include explicit expression of the right to employment of the disabled and other disadvantaged groups such as indigenous people, migrants and ethnic minorities, and programmes for encouraging their inclusion in the workforce. In countries that can afford them, employment subsidies can be an effective method of supporting the entry into employment of youth and the return to work of the long-term unemployed. For both groups, training requirements and the need to gain work experience are part of the rationale for public support.

51. Strategies for reducing youth unemployment were discussed at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Portugal, and at the third World Youth Forum of the United Nations System in Braga, Portugal, both held in August 1998; the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes[8] and the Braga Youth Action Plan[9] offer useful inputs into the discussion.

52. Some of the discussion during the International Year of Older Persons also provides useful material. Such issues as retirement ages, part-time work for older people, entrepreneurship among older persons and social security and pension arrangements are all important.

53. The goals of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities are well addressed in the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.[10] The question is whether there are any other

innovative ways of encouraging application of the Rules on which the special session could agree.

IV. Social integration

54. The agreed conclusions on promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons, adopted by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-sixth session,[11] together with the report of the Expert Workshop on Participation and Social Justice, held in London from 29 September to 3 October 1997 (E/CN.5/1997/4, annex), the report of the Expert Workshop on Ways and Means to Enhance Social Protection and Reduce Vulnerability, United Nations Headquarters, 10–14 November 1997 (E/CN.5/1998/5, annex) and the report of the Secretary-General on promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons (E/CN.5/1998/2), provide substantial input into discussion on social integration for the special session. As at the Summit, the goal of a "society for all" was accepted.

55. Issues that were mentioned in the agreed conclusions of the Commission or in debates during the organizational session, and that could possibly be included in the agenda of the special session include responsive government; participation; justice systems; civil society and voluntary activities; the importance of the role of the family; strengthening access to information; and the media. The importance of responsive government and participation was mentioned above.

56. One of the requirements for a viable sustainable society is the generally held sense that it is fair. People need confidence that justice will generally prevail. This involves both the rule of law and fair judicial procedures as well as social justice. Inequity in all its forms — political, socio-economic and cultural — is one of the principal impediments to overcoming social exclusion. The actions of the private sector, non-government organizations and other groups within civil society are as crucial as those of government if efforts to overcome social exclusion and poverty and to strengthen social integration are to succeed. Whether setting an agenda for action, or implementing decisions already taken, Governments have a keen interest and an important stake in forging a partnership with other social actors. An example of an area where public policy must be complemented by action of many branches of civil society is the one encompassing the goal of achieving effective and socially just multicultural societies.

57. A robust civil society is a prerequisite of participatory forms of government and a foundation for successful democratic development. Effective community organizations are also important in strengthening government accountability and transparency. A wide range of active non-government institutions within a democratic form of government provide the basis for a well-functioning society. At the same time, they help to maintain powerful underlying commitment to democratic development, political pluralism and the protection of individual liberties. While State action is indispensable in overcoming exclusion and fostering social integration, it is more successful when linked with an effective set of institutions in civil society.

58. What specific actions can Governments and other social actors undertake to ensure a coherent and continuous effort aimed at overcoming social exclusion in different fields? How may the operational space of such institutions of civil society as non-governmental organizations be increased, while ensuring at the same time efficient cooperation with government agencies in the areas of social concern such as employment promotion and poverty eradication?

59. Access to information has proved to be extremely important in establishing and maintaining a participatory culture at the national level. Although there are no ready-made schemes for promoting participation and social integration, the role of information is crucial in fostering policy dialogue and open political discourse. Better information-sharing can help Governments and all social actors to consider what is being done and what immediate priorities exist for the future. The efficacy of ongoing or proposed policy efforts in the social field can be better affirmed in a participatory way, with the effective involvement of the potential beneficiaries of proposed schemes. One of the challenges in this area is to make information that maximizes participation more readily available and user-friendly.

60. In many countries, the community-based organizations have been instrumental in strengthening the reciprocity networks and creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual support. This social capital is now recognized to be a crucial asset of society, the value of which is particularly clear when there are economic shocks and adverse economic conditions. Promoting community participation proves to be as important as fostering individual choice in increasing the economic productivity of the population, particularly in poor urban communities. The special session may wish to consider what policies can be recommended to make community participation in social development more effective.

61. A free, open and professional media based on diversity of ownership and control is a crucial factor in effective participatory governance. A linchpin and safeguard of democratic development, a free mass communications media plays an indispensable role in ensuring diversity in society and equality of opportunity. In a democratic context, where the rule of law is reinforced by appropriate legal structures, a free media enables even smaller groups to define and represent themselves, providing at the same time an opportunity for open discussion, which is so important in peaceful resolution of actual or potential conflicts.

62. A growing concern in some countries has been the role of mass media in encouraging antisocial behaviour among vulnerable children and youth and in eroding the family influence in the socialization of children. An important and recent concern has been the impact of transnational informational technology and mass media on peoples' perceptions and expectations, in terms of their leading to or aggravating a conflict between expectations and realities, and between values and social roles, induced by the contrast between the cultures of rich countries and the pattern of opportunity in less well off societies.

63. In all countries, families are crucial in respect of the socialization of the young and the formation of relationships on which social cohesion depends. They are also one of the core providers of support for dependants, whether young, old or disabled. In many countries, they are the principal or only accessible providers. As the Commission agreed at its thirty-sixth session: "The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support."[12] Are there additional means of providing that support that the special session may wish to consider?

V. Equality and equity between women and men

64. Gender equality is an issue for societies as a whole. Given the comprehensiveness of the implications of the gender dimension, the most important contribution of the special session to gender equality may well be to ensure that the issue is considered in relation to each commitment outlined in the Copenhagen Declaration — to ensure, in other words, that gender is mainstreamed. The gender dimension is important in all areas of society and certainly not merely at the family level, where the relationship between men and women is most intimate.

65. There is a growing recognition among policy makers that redressing gender inequalities requires substantial changes in approaches to the formulation of policy, including development projects and programmes, specifically through the identification and recognition of gender factors in policy and programme design as well as subsequently in implementation. As with all national goals, however, gender mainstreaming involves emphasizing outcomes as well as plans and intentions. It implies changes in institutions, particularly the educational systems in relation to the new needs and concerns of society. Universal access to education for girls remains an issue of crucial importance in all countries. One concern for the special session will be whether targets can be strengthened and additional resources allocated to this essential requirement of human development.

66. Despite some progress, there is still gender-related discrimination in many countries, particularly at all levels of decision-making. Furthermore, without gender-sensitive policies, it is hardly possible to achieve alleviation of poverty because poverty has significant gender dimensions, for the causes and experiences of poverty can be different for women and men. Without the proper acknowledgement of gender factors, issues relating to a caring society that is supportive of children, sick people and the elderly cannot be adequately discussed. In high-income countries, it is impossible to discuss these issues and paid and unpaid work without reference to gender. In developing countries, two important gender-related issues are rural development and microcredit.

67. Since there will also be a special session of the General Assembly on follow-up to the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women at the beginning of June 2000, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", the question to be addressed in the planning for the special session on follow-up to the Summit is what specific additional initiatives relating to gender equality could most productively be considered. Universal access to education for girls could well be one of these issues, as could further initiatives relating to credit availability. Another issue that could appropriately be considered is affirmative action.

VI. Universal and equitable access to quality education and health services

68. Adequate provision of social services is an essential requirement for human development and improvement in the quality of life, and these in turn are closely linked with economic growth. The benefits of human development in terms of enhanced productivity and income are widely recognized, and it is intuitively and empirically clear that societies as a whole gain enormously when education and health care are accessible to all. On the other hand, when basic social services are cut back, this undermines the capacity of peoples to use their skills productively. However, cost-effectiveness continues to be an important criterion in choosing the means for delivery of social services.

69. Suggestions and recommendations for implementing Summit proposals in respect of social services are set out in a separate report of the Secretary-General for the consideration of the Commission at its current, thirty-seventh session (see E/CN.5/1999/2).

70. Investment in human development is of critical importance. Orientation of public expenditures in directions that will maximize the benefit to economic and social development, employment growth and empowerment of people deserves the highest priority. Increasing public expenditure on education, health and other social services can be accomplished by reducing low priority outlays such as military spending as well as through mobilizing additional resources. The special session might wish to consider the range of urgent and long-term measures aimed at preventing the erosion of human capital in countries that were experiencing fiscal stress caused by an imbalance between revenues and expenditures.

71. Means for strengthening recognition of the centrality of education to human development — for personal development, employment and building social responsibility — could be considered. The target for achieving universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 could be further accelerated through preparation and agreement on a strategy for provision of the required financial and human resources. Innovative methods and mechanisms to provide adequate funding could be explored. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened an inter-agency meeting to explore the feasibility of this approach. This could be one of the principal issues to be addressed at the special session.

72. The inadequacy of health care in many countries is clear and in fact there has been deterioration in the provision of health care in many countries during the last couple of decades. The World Health Organization (WHO) is now addressing this relatively neglected subject, and has agreed to prepare a document on this issue for the first session of the Preparatory Committee.

73. Access to both education and health services are at the heart of the 20/20 initiative. Representatives of some 50 countries and a dozen United Nations funds, programmes and organizations, attending a meeting in Hanoi to review progress made since the Oslo meeting on the Initiative in 1996, adopted the Hanoi Consensus on the 20/20 Initiative: Achieving Universal Access to Basic Social Services (A/53/684, annex), which begins by reiterating "that the goal of universal access to basic social services is based on ethical, legal and economic grounds" (para. 4); and goes on to state that "the Initiative suggests an indicative allocation of 20 per cent of national budgets in developing countries and 20 per cent of official development assistance to basic social services, in order to close the gap between current spending and the minimum level required to achieve universal access" (para. 6). The Hanoi Consensus, which includes recommendations, will be made available to the Commission at its thirty-seventh session.

VII. Accelerating the development of Africa and the least developed countries

74. Many of the studies already mentioned and those discussed below are of vital importance to Africa and other least developed countries, as regards, *inter alia*, education, health, employment, debt, rural development and official development assistance (ODA). Many initiatives are under way. The subregional conferences on follow-up to the Summit being organized by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) should contribute to identifying additional specifically focused initiatives. However, it is important to highlight a few critical issues that continue to pose a threat to Africa's potential for sustained economic growth and that do not receive the priority attention they deserve. These issues are (a) the diversification of Africa's economies; (b) the financial sector, in particular sound banking systems, and improving the intermediation role of the informal financial sector; and (c) human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

75. The majority of African countries continue to rely on too few commodities for export earnings which do not have good prospects for growth. Diversification of commodity production and exports is an effective way of improving food security, raising employment and incomes and also lessening Africa's vulnerability to changes in the external environment. This issue has been the subject of discussion in the General Assembly at its forty-eighth, forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions. The Secretary-General in a report on the subject recommended the establishment of a Diversification Facility to finance diversification projects and programmes. The Common Fund for Commodities has taken some action but little progress has been made on this issue. The special session can be the forum to remobilize support for the Facility and to spur action on this important aspect of African development.

76. Inadequate access to credit and high interest rates do not foster entrepreneurship and are deterrents to the establishment of dynamic small and medium-sized enterprises, the basis of a revitalized domestic private sector in Africa. There are particular institutional reasons for discussing them in relation to Africa. Background work is required on how the special session could make a contribution to dealing with this crucial subject.

77. The human, social and health problems associated with HIV/AIDS have the potential to undermine the recent gains being made by many African countries. The decline in life expectancy and the impact on the productive capacity of these countries, at a time when they are undergoing major political, economic, and social transitions, have enormous consequences. The special session could raise the issue of supporting comprehensive information and public-health campaigns. The secretariat of the Joint United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (UNAIDS) is preparing a proposal on the issue.

VIII. Ensuring that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals

78. The debate about the most appropriate policies to follow when countries face current-account deficits, structural imbalances and financial crises of different origins, while seeking to maintain or create conditions conducive to economic and employment growth without inflation, has continued since the Summit. A vigorous dialogue among different players with different viewpoints is under way.

79. Among the questions many countries have indicated that they intended raising in the preparations for, and at the special session itself are:

- What changes have been made to structural adjustment programmes since the Summit to implement the Summit commitment to ensuring that social development goals are included?
- To what extent has the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank practice in countries, as compared with institutional policy, actually changed? Are further recommendations required?

80. In the period since the Summit, many countries, and indeed the international system as a whole, have had to face severe disruptions, in some cases on an unprecedented scale. It has become clear that there are wide differences among Governments and professionals about the most appropriate means for handling the financial crises. For example, it is essential to improve the speed of response to crises. A crucial issue for discussion is how to ensure that social policies are incorporated in the initial macroeconomic strategy for dealing with crises.

IX. Increasing resources allocated to social development

81. Just as preparation for the special session on sustainable development led inevitably to the issue of finance for sustainable policies, the issue of resources has become even more important in the context of social development. Human services such as basic education and health care, technical and continuing education, information and extension services, care for the young, old and disabled and programmes to reduce marginalization of migrant, indigenous and other disadvantaged groups are principally provided through public outlays in most countries. In all countries, the major part of some social services has to be provided through the public sector in order to ensure equitable accessibility. Therefore, ensuring adequate sources of revenue is essential.

82. The total amount of revenue available to pay for all public goods is a political choice, as is the proportion of it that is allocated to social services. There is a widespread tendency at present to believe that taxes must be cut under pressure of immutable global forces, an aspect of which is tax competition between countries. An issue for possible discussion is whether this is correct or is a misleading

oversimplification. For example, in advanced economies, average proportional revenue collections have not fallen at all so far; in fact, the average proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries collected as revenue continued to edge up during the 1990s. It may well have plateaued by now, but it has only fallen in a few countries and those countries in which it has risen have offset this phenomenon. Data on developing countries vary more widely and are more difficult to interpret. The special session may wish to consider the dimensions of tax policy that are necessary to ensure that sufficient revenue is generated to pay for public services including social services. The issue is about ensuring sufficient public resources for public purposes.

83. Increases in revenue collections may well be feasible in many countries. The most notable exceptions are those in which the ratio of revenue to GDP is already high. Increased collections can commonly be achieved simply by improving the efficiency of tax administrations.

84. Within many national budgets, there may well be scope for reconsidering the allocation of resources, for example by reducing military outlays in order to release funds for higher priority human services. Such reallocation has the twin benefits of improving services and of increasing labour-intensive employment.

85. Development cooperation assistance continues to be an issue of crucial importance to many countries with low average incomes or that experience national disasters. One possible intermediate target, which the special session could consider, would be agreeing to reverse the current decline; that is to say, the special session could agree to urge each donor country that has not reached the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA, to decide to increase the proportion of its GNP allocated to aid for each of the next five years. At least three countries have started to do this or have announced plans to do so — Ireland, Germany, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland — in addition to those that are already providing more than 0.7 per cent, namely, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

86. The international debts of severely indebted low-income countries are such a major constraint on poverty reduction strategies that it would be appropriate for the special session to consider the issue. The position of severely indebted middle-income countries and of moderately indebted low-income countries could also be addressed.

87. Another issue is that of private finance for development. In the aftermath of the international financial crisis, private financial flows to developing countries have declined and the picture for the future is less clear. The Commission could consider including issues relating to the attraction and management of direct foreign investment in the agenda, or determine whether such issues should more appropriately be left to a United Nations conference on finance for development.

X. Implementation and institutional reform

88. One of the benefits of preparation for the special session will be the opportunity it offers for sharing experience with respect to national mechanisms used for implementing and monitoring Summit commitments. Some countries have included goals and policies based on those adopted at the Summit in national strategies; others have introduced new approaches to policy development, have renewed or maintained existing institutions or have sought additional external support. Some have done very little.

89. A tool that some countries have found useful is social impact assessment. The special session might wish to consider a clear commitment to the use of social impact assessments as a technique for evaluating national policy and programme initiatives and major projects. The establishment of national units for planning and evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and the strengthening of such units within international development cooperation agencies could be considered. This could be extended to introduction of international social auditing of the type undertaken in relation to economies by IMF and OECD.

90. All countries would benefit from stronger and more effective international commitment to implementation. Clarifying which strategic goals are to be sought in the field of social and economic development as well as better ways of achieving them is one of the main objectives of the United Nations system. The mandates as well as the policies and established practices of the specialized agencies and funds differ, making collaboration even more imperative. Policy implementation in many socio-economic areas requires not only the concerted efforts of international agencies but also cooperation beyond agency boundaries to ensure effectiveness.

91. The United Nations, its funds and programmes, the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions are all undergoing a process of reform and reorientation. The special session could consider measures designed to ensure that the objective and policy approaches of the Summit are

reflected effectively in the mandates, programmes and coordination arrangements of these international institutions.

XI. Conclusion

92. This report is a preliminary set of suggestions about issues that could be addressed in the context of the special session. The thirty-seventh session of the Commission will be the first focused opportunity for Governments to comment on and propose additional issues and to suggest priorities. It is important to emphasize that preparation for the special session is a process. There will be four meetings at which issues can be discussed, two sessions of the Preparatory Committee and two sessions of the Commission for Social Development. This gives considerable opportunity for additional initiatives to be discussed and agreed before the special session. At the present stage, the crucial need is for identifying priorities and mandating the elaboration of a few specific initiatives.

Notes

[1] See *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6–12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I, sect. C.

[2] Ibid., annex II.

[3] Ibid., annex I.

[4] General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

[5] General Assembly resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986, annex.

[6] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 6* (E/1997/26), chap. I, sect. D., resolution 35/2, agreed conclusions on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods, para. 3.

[7] Ibid.

[8] A/53/378, annex I.

[9] A/53/378, annex II.

[10] General Assembly resolution 48/96 of 20 December 1993, annex.

[11] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 6* (E/1998/26), chap. I, sect. B, resolution 36/1.

[12] Ibid., resolution 36/1, agreed conclusions, para. 23.